



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, February 27, 2002

CONTACT: Jeff Neal
202/224-6167

CHAFEE AMENDMENT COULD SAVE \$5.7 MILLION FOR RI Chafee-Authored Provision to Election Reform Bill Ensures RI Eligible for Federal Funds

WASHINGTON, DC – The U.S. Senate today approved national election reform legislation that includes an amendment authored by Senator Lincoln Chafee that could save Rhode Island as much as \$5.7 million through Fiscal Year 2006. As originally written, the bill effectively would have penalized Rhode Island for having had the foresight to begin replacement of its older, Shoup lever, voting machines.

"In 1998 – long before the Florida recount – Rhode Island began upgrading to optical scan voting machines" Chafee said. "It is unfair to punish states such as Rhode Island for having the foresight to do the right thing in 1998, while rewarding other states and cities that did nothing to improve their voting technology."

"This amendment will allow a state or locality that entered into a multi-year contract for upgraded voting equipment to apply for federal grants to cover any payments made after 2001. This amendment not only helps communities that lagged behind, but provides equity to states that moved to fix these voting problems long before they caused national turmoil."

Rhode Island Secretary of State Edward S. Inman, III, also noted the importance of Chafee's amendment. "I want to thank Senator Chafee and our entire Congressional delegation for working to ensure that Rhode Island will receive its fair share of federal funding to enact real and lasting electoral reform."

"Unlike states such as Florida, Rhode Island did the right thing by investing early in a modern and accurate voting system," Inman continued. "That type of forward thinking should be encouraged throughout the nation, and I'm confident this legislation will now allow states, like ours, to make other much needed improvements to our electoral system."

Equal Protection of Voting Rights Act

The Equal Protection of Voting Rights Act of 2001 (S. 565) is designed to reform national election and voting standards in order to prevent the type of mishaps that affected the last presidential election. The legislation includes a provision to provide \$3 billion in grants to help states and localities meet the new federal minimum requirements included in the bill. States and localities that purchase new voting equipment to comply with the new requirements are eligible to apply for funding under this provision.

-- more --

The Rhode Island Dilemma

In 1998, Rhode Island entered into a ten-year program to replace Shoup lever voting machines with optical scan equipment. To date, Rhode Island has spent approximately \$4.5 million under this contract, with an additional \$5.7 million in state funds to be paid through fiscal year 2006. Under the bill as originally written, Rhode Island would have been ineligible to apply to the federal government for funding to offset these pre-existing costs.

The Chafee Amendment

In response, Senator Chafee authored and successfully proposed an amendment to S. 565 to allow states and localities such as Rhode Island to apply for funding for previously contracted voting equipment improvements. The amendment, cosponsored by Senator Jack Reed, would also help other states and localities, including the state of Hawaii, the City of Chicago, the City of Detroit, and Dallas County, TX.

Background to S. 565

The Equal Protection of Voting Rights Act would create a new federal agency, the Election Administration Commission (EAC) to study and recommend administrative and legislative actions that would improve the administration of elections in America. The bill would also establish minimum federal standards that states must meet by 2006. Finally, S. 565 authorizes a total of \$3.5 billion in federal grants to states and localities to fund technology improvements, voter education programs and to improve accessibility for disabled voters.

The House of Representatives approved a similar bill on December 12, 2001. However, that bill did not include the changes made by the Chafee amendment, leaving Rhode Island ineligible for technology improvement funds. A Conference Committee between the House and Senate will be appointed to work out the details of the final legislation. Senator Chafee will work to ensure this provision is included in the bill to be sent to the president.

###